DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 314 668 CG 022 202

AUTHOR Madden, Margaret E.; And Others
TITLE Perceptions of Characteristics Considered Attractive by the Other Gender.
PUB DATE Mar 89
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association (Boston, MA, March 30-April 2, 1989).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Attitude Measures; College Students; Comparative Analysis; *Dating (Social); Higher Education; *Interpersonal Attraction; *Mate Selection; *Personality Traits; *Sex Differences; *Social Attitudes; Student Attitudes

ABSTRACT

Rating adjectives, 54 female and 53 male college students indicated their own preferences in dating partners or their perceptions of the other gender's preferences. The men rated good looks and physical health higher than the women did, while the women valued industriousness more than the men did. Both men and women valued intelligence more than they thought the other sex valued intelligence, and both felt that the other sex valued a dominating partner more than subjects of the other sex actually did. The women rated emotional stability more highly than the men, but both men and women underestimated its importance to the other gender. (Six references and two tables are included.) (Author/TE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED314668

Perceptions of Characteristics Considered Attractive By the Other Gender

Margaret E. Madden*, David Mitchell,

and Zina Dean

Franklin Pierce College

Paper presented at the Eastern Psychological Association, Boston, March, 1989.

*Mailing Address: Department of Psychology, Franklin Pierce College, Rindge, NH 03461

CG022202

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Margaret Madden

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Perceptions of Characteristics Considered Attractive By the Other Gender

Margaret E. Madden*, David Mitchell,

and Zina Dean

Abstract

Rating adjectives, female and male subjects indicated their own preferences in dating partners or their perceptions of the other gender's preferences. Men considered good looks and physical health more important than women; women valued industriousness more than men. Both men and women valued intelligence more than they thought the other sex values intelligence and felt that the other sex values a dominating partner more than other sex subjects actually did. Women rated emotional stability more highly than men, but both men and women underestimated its importance to the other gender.

Perceptions of Characteristics Considered Attractive By the Other Gender

Introduction

The extensive literature on characteristics considered attractive in potential mates indicates that men and women find different traits attractive. Comparing students' perceptions of desirable characteristics of a mate in 1939, 1956, and 1967, Hudson and Henze (1969) found great consistency among the three cohorts. Males evaluated dependable character as most important in all three cohorts; chastity declined in importance, and good looks increased in importance over the years. Women valued emotional stability and dependable character most and good looks and similar political background least. For women, the value of chastity declined and the value of education-intelligence increased in 1967 compared to prior years.

Hoyt and Hudson (1981) reported that, in 1977, both males and females rated emotional stability, mutual attraction, dependable character, and pleasing disposition as the most important features of a potential marriage partner. Women regarded similar educational background and good financial prospect as

more important than men; men considered good looks and good cook-housekeeper to be more important than women.

Using dimensions derived from other research with married couples, Buss and Barnes (1986) found that college students valued kind and understanding, exciting personality, intelligent, physically attractive, healthy, and easygoing as most attractive. College men preferred physically attractive mates more than women; women rated good earning capacity and college graduate more highly than men.

Misconceptions about what the other sex desires in a mate may lead one to avoid forming relationships if one believes one cannot meet the other's standards, low self-esteem, or deliberate or inadvertant miscommunication during the initial phases of a relationship. Thus, it is important to examine whether people have misconceptions about what the other sex wants in a dating partner. However, no research to date has examined the congruence between people's perceptions of what other-sex people want in a mate and other-sex people's actual perceptions.

Method

Fifty-three male and fifty-four female college students were told that they were participating in a study about perceptions of attraction. Using a 9-point scale, they indicated the desirability of characteristics found to be important to attractiveness by other researchers (Buss & Barnes, 1986; Hoyt & Hudson, 1981). Half of the subjects described their own preferences, responding to the instruction, "If you were looking for a date how important would each of these characteristics be in considering a choice for a date." The other half of the subjects described their perceptions of the preferences of the other sex, responding to the question, "Based on your perceptions of how people of the sex opposite to yours evaluate others, rate the following characteristics. In general, if people of the opposite sex were looking for dates, how important would each of the following traits be to them in considering a choice for a date?"

Results

A two-way analysis of variance found several main effects for subjects' gender. Men valued good looks (M = 6.90) and physical health (M = 7.06) more highly than women (health: M = 6.14, $F(1,96) = 7.82$, $p < .01$; looks, M = 5.96, $F(1,101) = 8.26$, $p < .01$) and women (M = 7.00) valued ambition/industriousness more than men (M = 6.14; $F(1,96) = 6.83$, $p < .01$).

Insert Table 1 about here

Main effects for condition (i.e., self-rating vs. other-rating) were found, as well. People value intelligence (M = 7.52) more than they think the other sex values intelligence (M = 6.74; $F(1,96) = 5.35$, $p < .05$), and people felt that the other sex values a dominating partner (self-rating: M = 3.18; other-rating M= 4.08; $F(1,96) = 4.88$, $p < .05$) more than other sex subjects actually did.

Insert Table 2 about here

In addition, there was an interaction between gender and condition; women (M = 7.70) rated emotional stability more highly than men (M = 7.20) did, and both genders underestimated its importance to the other sex (men's perception of women, M = 6.85; women's perception of men M = 7.55; $F(1,93) = 4.51$, $p < .05$).

Discussion

The first hypothesis in the study was that men and women have different ideals for other-sex romantic partners. This was true in regards to physical attractiveness, good health, and ambition in the present study. The finding that men value good looks more than women is consistent with other research (e.g., Byrne, Landon, & Reeves, 1971; Hoyt & Hudson, 1981). More interesting is the finding that men value good health more than women, which Hoyt and Hudson (1981) also found. Perhaps good looks are related to good health in men's minds; looks and health were significantly correlated in the present study (r = .29, $p < .01$). Women valued ambition-industriousness more than men in this study, consistent with the impression that, traditionally, women may be more practical in their selection of partners because they are usually financially dependent on their husbands and have more to lose from a bad choice than men (Rubin, 1973).

The second hypothesis was that subjects of each gender would misperceive the ideals of the other gender. On most characteristics subjects' perceptions of the other gender's ideals were relatively accurate, but the exceptions are noteworthy. Neither gender desired a dominant partner much, but they both

perceived that the other gender wanted their dates to be more dominant than others actually reported wanting. This could lead to conflict in relationships; if both partners believe that their mates want to dominate them, they may misinterpret the partners' actions and resent behavior that was not intended to be dominating.

Intelligence was valued rather highly by both men and women, but all subjects felt that the other gender did not appreciate it much. One might speculate that people attempt to hide their intelligence when they are on dates. Indeed, reports of this sort of behavior have been used as evidence of women's "fear of success" (e.g., Horner, 1972), yet the current study suggests that men might do the same thing since they also feel that women do not value intelligence as much as women actually do.

Women valued emotional stability more highly than men did, but they also underestimated its importance to men. Men recognized that emotional stability was important to women, but still underestimated its important. Thus, both sexes underestimate the importance of emotional stability to the other sex.

In summary, men thought that good looks and physical health were more important in a potential mate than women and women valued ambition/industriousness

more than men. Both men and women value intelligence more than they think the other sex values intelligence and feel that the other sex values a dominating partner more than other sex subjects actually did. Women rated emotional stability more highly than men did, but women underestimated its importance to men and men underestimated its importance to women.

References

Buss, D.M., & Barnes, M. (1986). Preferences in human mate selection. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 50, 559-570.

Byrne, D., Landon, O., & Reeves, K. (1968). The effects of physical attractiveness, sex, and attitude similarity on interpersonal attraction. Journal of Personality, 36, 259-271.

Horner, M. S. (1972). Toward an understanding of achievement-related conflicts in women. Journal of Social Issues, 28, 157-175.

Hoyt, L.F., & Hudson, J.W. (1981). Personal characteristics important in mate preferences among college students. Social Behavior and Personality, 9, 93-96.

Hudson, J.W., & Henze, L.F. (1969). Campus values in mate selection: A replication. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 31, 772-775.

Rubin, Z. (1973). Liking and loving. New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.

Table 1: Females' and males' mean ratings of attractiveness of personality characteristics (9-point scale).

Characteristic	Mean Ratings	
	Males	Females
Dependable Character	7.23	7.71
Emotional Stability	7.35	7.27
Pleasing Disposition	7.33	7.75
Mutual Attraction	8.00	7.98
Good Health	7.06	6.14*
Desire for Children	4.60	5.35
Refinement	5.83	5.81
Good Cook-Housekeeper	4.57	4.33
Ambition-Industriousness	6.14	7.00*
Chastity	4.89	4.94
Dominating	3.61	3.55
Exciting	7.14	7.59
Education	7.00	6.90
Intelligence	7.41	7.10
Sociability	7.12	7.43
Similar Religious Background	3.98	3.13
Good Looks	6.90	5.96*
Similar Educational Background	4.66	4.74
Favorable Social Status	5.23	5.28
Good Financial Prospect	4.83	5.53
Similar Political Background	2.74	3.15
Affectionate	7.94	8.00
Easy-Going	7.77	7.39

*$p < .05$

Table 2: Mean ratings of personality characteristics valued oneself compared to those valued by the other sex (9-point scale).

Characteristic	Mean Ratings	
	Oneself	Other Sex
Dependable Character	7.56	7.37
Emotional Stability	7.42	7.20
Pleasing Disposition	7.54	7.53
Mutual Attraction	7.94	8.04
Good Health	6.62	6.41
Desire for Children	5.30	4.67
Refinement	5.89	5.76
Good Cook-housekeeper	4.33	4.57
Ambition-Industriousness	6.63	6.43
Chastity	4.65	5.16
Dominating	3.18	4.08*
Exciting	7.22	7.51
Education	7.10	6.80
Intelligence	7.52	6.74*
Sociability	7.39	7.16
Similar Religious Background	3.83	3.30
Good Looks	6.56	6.41
Similar Educational Background	4.77	4.63
Favorable Social Status	5.27	5.24
Good Financial Prospect	5.10	5.26
Similar Political Background	2.55	3.33
Affectionate	7.98	7.96
Easy-Going	7.53	7.63

*$p < .05$